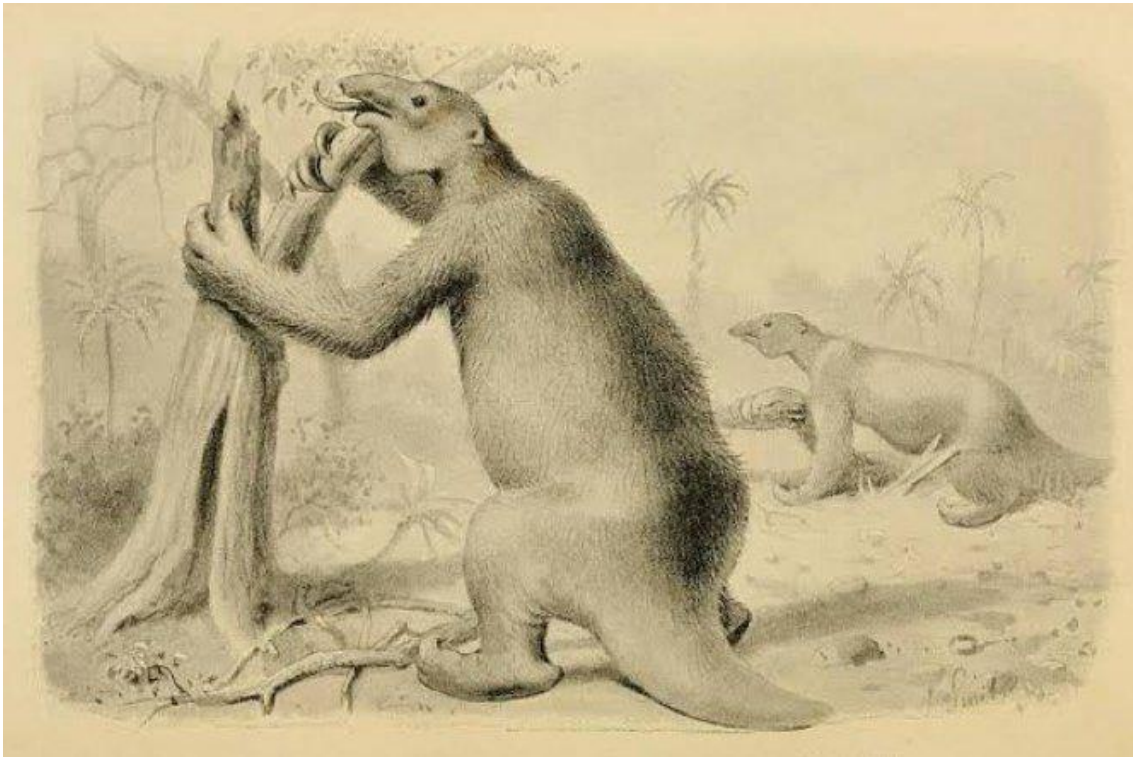


Luis Jorge Salinas – Sergio Salinas Calcagno

Amazonas: Pleistocene Park?

A true account



English translation

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Prologue

Dear readers: it is my deep desire and will, through this humble account, to take you on a fascinating and extraordinary journey to a world most people could not imagine.

With my simple words I will try to explain the events that occurred, so that you may understand and develop in your minds a real image of what I proceed to tell you.

I give you my word of honor at this very moment and I would like to assure you that all the events you will witness in this book were and are real, and that no matter how unusual or unbelievable they may seem, only those who have witnessed similar situations accepted my words without doubt, and the rest will judge the credibility of my story according to their ideals, knowledge, or information.

Luis Jorge Salinas

Chapter One: What Were They?

My name is Luis Jorge Salinas, I was born on May 2, 1961, in Mar del Plata, province of Buenos Aires, Argentine Republic.

I am the fifth child of a large family of eleven, of lower-middle class, whose father, a noble construction worker who studied later in life and became a teacher at the National School of Technical Education, from which he retired, had to work tremendously hard to carry out such a feat.

I remember his few but certain words, perhaps hiding his affection so as not to overshadow the departure of a son: be happy, decent, and cautious. He came from a family of 14 siblings and knew exactly that it had to be that way, as well as, before causing any harm, the door of his house would always be open in any eventuality.

My mother, a housewife, with the enormous task of cooking and washing for this “regiment,” self-taught and wise, somehow managed to find the time to read and learn, and to raise us honestly.

A great seamstress, she sewed and reseeded the clothes of the older siblings for the younger ones in her immense knowledge, making use of everything for everyone, without meanness, mixing it with tenderness and patience, so that the biting cold of the winter in my city would not be felt.

My siblings and I went to public school, which was good at the time, but the foundations of our education were always at home, to be decent, good, and united. At a certain age our parents gave us the freedom to choose and make of our lives the path we desired, and thus, one by one, I saw my older siblings begin their journeys, until my turn came.

I began my wanderings as a traveler around 1980, with eyes wide open and eager for everything new. I had in my hands a pile of learned trades, which gives anyone, along with the will to work, the assurance of landing on their feet anywhere.

Thus I traveled almost all of Argentina from Ushuaia to Misiones, along desolate routes where hitchhiking was an adventure in which many things are learned, mainly to value and miss the warmth and peace of home.

One fine day at last, in 1985, I crossed the border into Brazil, traveling through its immense states to the northwest, curiously exploring everything I could in each place I passed, until I reached beyond the Amazon River.

The jungle began to powerfully attract my attention, the “mato” as they call it, the wildlife, navigating its rivers, and contemplating the wild richness it

holds. And so I reached the border with Venezuela and tried to cross it, but the soldiers of that time did not allow me, leaving me stranded between the two countries.

It was my first mishap since I could not re-enter Brazil without the Venezuelan stamp, and vice versa. I walked a long way inside that no man's land, and night had already fallen without being able to resolve the situation. Amusingly I was denied entry at both borders and had no idea what to do.

I sat down near the Brazilian barrier where the guard had already changed, and the gendarme who took over said to me: "I'm going to eat a sandwich and when I return I don't want to see you. Understood?" And so was my re-entry into Brazilian territory, in a quick, silent, and ILLEGAL run.

From Boa Vista along the Inter-Amazonian highway, I reached Manaus, capital of the state of Amazonas, the largest in Brazil, determined to find work, as my financial resources were practically exhausted. I had no luck there.

For several days I had to sleep at the bus terminal, which was active and busy toward the interior of the state, although most traveled by boat along the Great River.

I managed some odd jobs to eat, but I still couldn't pay for a boarding house or hotel. My luck was chatting with Carioca, a man who came and went there continuously, and he told me that at the farm where he worked they needed employees.

Off we went, to kilometer 38 of the AM-10, Japanese colony, a farm dedicated to raising laying hens, and I quickly learned the trade and socialized with the ten people who worked as farmers.

At that time I was 24 years old, athletic build, I liked boxing, running along the road in my free hours, and venturing into the jungle, discovering the great variety of insects, plants, and animals that inhabit it, delighted to observe everything around me.

I met Joanna, a co-worker and neighbor, since we all lived on the farm. I had a small single room next to three others, and behind them were three houses for related families.

Joanna's father was of Portuguese descent and her mother a native of the area. She had not been educated in schools but knew about fruits, roots, and edible plants, and she was respectful, attractive, and simple.

She soon showed an interest in me, and we started meeting in secret. She was 18 and I was 24, so it was only a matter of time and caution, especially since her father was somewhat wary of me.

Inevitably, like any young couple, we began a secret romance, excusing ourselves to go dancing in the city, for walks, etc. She always knew the truth about me, that I was only passing through and that one day I would leave as I had arrived, believing that in this way I would manage to control the desires of a young adolescent, and constantly asking her not to fall in love with me.

In those days, at dusk, some truly impressive howls began to be heard, pitiful and frightening. I had already gotten used to hearing howler monkeys (guaribas) at night, who vocalize all together and sound like a pride of lions that can be heard kilometers away.

This was different. The howling came from just one, and it passed in front of the farm mostly on moonless nights, when not even shadows could be perceived in the darkness, always along the AM-10, which at that time of year saw four cars a day, no more.

In those days Teresa, the owner of the farm, had entrusted me with the task of controlling the wild cats at dusk, which wreaked havoc inside the chicken coops with the young chicks. The cats bit the chicks' legs from under the cages, pulled them, dismembered them, and ate them.

We constantly found them dismembered and this worried her greatly. She gave me a 20-gauge shotgun and a handful of cartridges, and I began my hunt.

These wild cats are the same as the domestic cats of the city, but it seems that being in the wild, they display all their tireless predatory instincts and grow a little larger.

But what aroused more curiosity and interest in me were those superhuman howls, which almost always ended like a loud belch.

Asking the locals, most were astonished when hearing them, except those who claimed it was the "lobisomen" (werewolf) or "paçalobo" as they called it, which of course I, skeptical by nature, did not believe possible.

What they all had in common was fear of something that was undoubtedly large and terrifying. The 20 meters that separated the houses from the road, the very little lighting there was, and that overwhelming howling were not something to be peeking at.

The days passed and the howling continued at night, and my curiosity pushed me, until I saw in the darkness first an undefined shadow that quickly passed without being able to identify it, except one night.

The four of us were chatting under the light of the bachelor's quarters when I heard something howling in the distance. I told them to stay quiet with the light off and that I would go to the front gate with my shotgun ready.

I quickly chose a spot to crouch down, and pointing toward the road, I waited for that chilling howl to arrive. I thought that if it was someone “playing smart” to scare the locals I would fire a shot in the air to frighten him, but if it was an animal I would shoot to kill and try to capture it.

The howling was already very loud and I quickly thought: it is not human. While my mind tried to think and understand what kind of animal was approaching, I began to make out the silhouette, resembling a gorilla, with a swaying, bipedal walk, incredible. I was sure there are no gorillas in that place, this couldn't be!

My astonishment was total and unexpected, when its grotesque and formidable profile began to pass in front of me. It raised its head, small in relation to its body, with a short snout and shining eyes, and howled with such effort that its chest vibrated noticeably.

His thick arms hung forward, with large claws whose fingers I could not count, upright on his short, wide hind legs, his neck seemed very thin and leaning forward, showing a hump, covered with fur all over his body except for the chest; I defined him at that moment as a gorilla's body with a dog's head.

Determined to shoot to capture that unknown creature, I aimed at the precise moment it turned its head and saw me, it froze, and I could see the surprise in its eyes. I shot straight at its face, hitting it head-on, spinning it around, and as it fell turning, it let out a whimper like a dog being struck.

As I tried to reload the shotgun and follow its movements, from about 8 meters away, in the dim light, it rose with its back to me, its head hanging like a rag, its forelimbs up, and began galloping on all fours, crashing into trees and branches, from left to right, hitting one tree and running the other way, blind, its paws pounding the ground with great force and violence, its tail short and thin, held almost upright; I couldn't see it anymore but I felt it move away galloping, then the sound of what seemed to be it collapsing, and then silence.

I was still in shock but my instinct told me not to go looking for it then, in that darkness.

It wasn't very tall, I'd say about one meter sixty or seventy, but very broad, strong, with notable claws on its limbs, badly wounded. I hadn't moved from there yet when one of my companions came running up to me, saying excitedly: “You hit it, you hit it!” and asked me what it was like since they, 20 meters farther back, had only seen the silhouette.

We gathered to talk and one of them kept repeating: “I told you, it's a lobisomen!” The others didn't know what it was, and the oldest said he had seen shadows the size of a horse but never knew what they were. Two hours later we all went to sleep.

About an hour later, already in bed, I was awakened by a roar so loud it seemed to be just outside the door. I grabbed the shotgun, cracked the door open, and saw at the entrance fence a silhouette larger than anything I had ever imagined in my life, about 3 meters tall, of the same species as the other, standing on its hind legs, moving its head from side to side, roaring with an uncontrolled, terrifying fury.

It lasted only a few minutes and then it left, standing exactly where the other had been, and it seemed to be an adult. If the first one had seemed strong to me, this one was truly fearsome. That night I hardly slept: what were they?

The next morning, everyone's first comment was: “furioso o grandao!” (the big guy is furious). I was eager to finish my workday to search the surrounding area for the supposed corpse of the unknown animal. During our conversations, we recalled a certain strong stench, like a skunk's, that could be smelled in the afternoons, and depending on the wind, it was either faint or very intense. That afternoon and the ones that followed, I explored the place where I might find it, but nothing—not a trace. Feeling relieved, I analyzed the situation and felt comforted that I had listened to my instinct that night, otherwise the giant would have gotten me and I wouldn't be here to tell the story.

A thousand times those images like a horror movie crossed my mind, searching for details, trying to place and identify it, without being able to.

Like anyone, I was used to seeing “known” things, and this filled me with amazement and uncertainty.

When I saw it from behind I clearly felt it was a bear, and from the side it looked like a gorilla's body. Also, seeing them at night made me think their fur was black, but I began to compare it with a doubtful, fleeting sighting I had had those days while hunting.

I remember hearing the crack of thick branches, something normal there since wind knocks down branches or even trees, so I happened to look up to my right, about 30 meters away, and saw, with its back to me, standing in a thick fork, what I thought was a large reddish monkey, breaking a big branch with force from each arm.

I walked as quietly as I could, aiming at that height, but it was no longer there. This happened only once inside the farm.

From then on, every evening after dark I would sit and watch the road in the darkness, and indeed large shadows kept passing by, but now without howls or any noise.

I felt that I should not try to hunt them, and that I wouldn't be able to take down those hulks with that weapon. So I stayed very still near the front

gate, half hidden, and as I listened carefully, I realized they were vocalizing among themselves.

Anyone, including me, would have mistaken them for toads, a deep croak but with a g (groac). I heard them and saw them gesture with their heads upward, stretching their necks; they were calling each other, always one at a time, as if following a trail, that very particular smell, and spaced several meters apart.

Some stopped to nibble on flattened remains on the asphalt and then continued sniffing along the ground like tracking dogs. Some females, a little smaller than the adult male, walked with a tiny baby following behind their hind legs.

Right in front of the farm there was a mango plantation, the fruits still very unripe but with many leaves, young trees about 3 meters tall. The female would bite off small twigs and let them fall, so the young could eat them off the ground.

The adult male—or more than one, since in their comings and goings controlling the group I can't be sure if it was the same or others—nervous, imposing, defiant, observant, looked at me several times, showing not fear but distrust, wariness, though he was not disturbed or stopped by my presence.

On one occasion, watching a female eat there among those mango trees, she suddenly froze, motionless, and tucked her head almost into her shoulders as I heard two people talking in the dark as they walked along the road, locals heading to another farm with a flashlight they occasionally turned on. They passed about 4 meters from me without noticing, in the darkness, and about 3 meters from her, who, once those people had gone, began to move as if in slow motion, stealthily, and slipped away among the trees.

Forgive me for so many details of the events, but my intention is that, besides letting the common reader imagine it, scientists, specialists, or researchers interested in this kind of material might understand and interpret it, and reach the conclusion that this is real.

The people who lived on the farm never managed to see more than shadows on certain occasions, which I could not understand. What could there be different between them and me?

They didn't show much interest either. To help you understand better, I'll make a comparison: cars pass by your house every day, right? But would you stop to analyze if it's a gasoline or diesel car, or what brand it is, just from the sound it makes? No, you simply don't pay attention to them. Well, the same thing happens in the jungle with animal sounds; nobody pays attention, no matter how strange they seem.

I, curious by nature and always observing what surrounds me, noticed there was something different I couldn't explain, for example, one evening, already dark, moonless and starry, I went to buy food at the small stand owned by my friend Heraldo Becerra, a kilometer from the farm.

Everyone in the area walks down the middle of the deserted road when it's too dark to see; you feel the asphalt under your feet if you don't have a flashlight, usually to avoid stepping on the roadside where there might be a snake or spider, etc.

Suddenly I heard the sound of sniffing very close to me, I stopped and quickly crouched down, to see against the stars and distinguish what animal was approaching, and to my surprise, two meters from me, I saw the large silhouette of a female of the unknown species, stopped with her snout against the ground.

I, startled, stood up, and she turned the other way and began to flee, her head fully turned toward me, slipping into the only bush by the fence, which was almost comical, since the bush was smaller than she was, she couldn't hide, and she barreled into the fence as if tangled in it, until she managed to leap over and gallop into the open field. I could only watch that event and regret not having a camera, incredible. What were they?

So many observations, so many events, and not knowing what these mysterious giants were. What could I do? No one there was bothered by them.

In spite of everything, I already knew they were not aggressive, they didn't attack the villagers, they loitered there or just passed through on their way somewhere farther, using the road as open space that allowed these large animals to move quickly.

It was around that time that my relationship with Joanna was discovered and I was summoned to meet her family. Her father simply gave me seven days to marry her or face the consequences, in a threatening tone, to which I refused, and on the eighth day I found myself cornered in my room, fending off the onslaught of the entire family clan.

I was lucky, but I didn't want to stay there anymore, since I couldn't turn my back on anyone, especially the father, so I decided to leave that very night and avoid worse trouble. The farm's owner understood the situation and recommended me to another Japanese farm, a few kilometers farther down the same road.

There I began my new job, but only a few days passed before Joanna's mother and sister found me, this time to talk. They apologized and explained the depression she had fallen into, and promised they would give us permission to do as we pleased.

I explained to her and her family that I was only passing through, but she still insisted she would be by my side as long as it took, and so we were together for a few months on this other farm at kilometer 56.

The wooden shack we were given was almost on the roadside and there too, several nights these animals I've mentioned galloped past. Where were they going? What were they? A mystery. 18 kilometers away and they were still passing, week after week.

One day I decided to go elsewhere and leave behind the mystery of those animals, and I left, regretful for not letting myself fall in love, and with Joanna's tears at my departure.

I returned to my homeland and in 1987 I was once again sailing on Argentine fishing boats in the south, since my seaman's book was still active. I wasn't a permanent crew member and I did relief work for various fishing companies. There was plenty of work, but for me it was all maritime adventures, and I knew I wouldn't do it for many years.

That year I met the woman who touched my heart, I fell madly in love like never before, Viviana, my beloved wife and mother of my two daughters, Gisele and Jesica, who are my life, my three loves. We married in 1989 and within months our first daughter was born.

Chapter Two: What Are They?

I changed jobs, on solid ground, and dedicated myself to enjoying my family while we awaited our second daughter. Everything changed within me, I was definitively settled and immersed in daily work, with the ups and downs of changes in our country.

In 2003, a magazine fell into my hands that mentioned a scientific article called “mapinguarí,” that certain scientists are searching different areas of the Amazon for a “terrible beast.” Multiple eyewitness encounters have been reported, describing a creature that walks on two legs and has a terrifying howl.

These elusive animals had been seen in different states and with varying appearances, and this news captured my astonishment in such a way that it carried me back to the past, comparing the reports with what I keep in my memory, and so I began to search whenever I could for information or details of this investigation led by a North American born in 1954, naturalized Brazilian, David Conway Oren, ornithologist and researcher for the Goeldi Museum in Belém do Pará, Brazil.

This man has now been searching for more than 20 years, among other activities he carries out. I see on TV his expeditions in search of evidence and attempts to prove the real existence of these animals. I search the Internet for magazines, books, etc., hoping that this good man will have great luck—for himself, for the fact that his prestige is already at stake publicly, for science, and for me, because I have that thirst to know what the truth is.

For a moment I wished I could be there on the expeditions, return to the adventures of my youth, but I held back—my family, my still small daughters... I don’t know. To go through again things like people laughing in your face and saying: “you’re wrong,” “you imagined it,” “you’re completely crazy,” or “it’s impossible.” It’s very hard for ordinary people to believe you.

I’ve even thought about it this way: being the only one in a country, or perhaps all of America, or the world, who could see a herd of these animals that have been considered **extinct since the Pleistocene—more than 13,000 years ago!** And that’s why I preferred to keep silent. What are they?

This man, David Oren, inspires great respect and admiration in me. I’ve read criticism about him and his research, saying that he is completely wrong and doesn’t know what he’s doing, but I know it’s true, just as it sounds: TRUE.

In 1999, Oren wrote to the group of specialists in edentates, suggesting the possible existence of surviving ground sloths. I researched on the Internet to see what that family of animals looked like, but it is very different from what I

saw, and it confuses me to think that maybe he is looking for another kind of animal. But in 2001 he wrote about them again, now changing to possible remnants of the family Megalonychidae, a species of giant ground sloth with a different build than the mylodon.

I obtained images of skeletons from different museums and found 22 related species of megalonychids, and the most similar is *Megalonyx wheatleyi*. I may be making a serious mistake, since it could also be an unidentified or similar genus.

How did Oren arrive at such a conclusion? That's something I would like to ask him. I applaud him and imagine that perseverance through the years, and that passion inside that these things awaken, which perhaps for those who don't understand is very difficult to grasp.

In 2006 I began saving clippings, news, data—for example: Mr. Oren, according to several Internet pages and cryptozoology magazines, is said to have collected more than a hundred testimonies from indigenous peoples, locals, river dwellers, hunters, etc., with descriptions of the animal in question.

It is good to know that the name “mappinguarí” is of indigenous origin (protector of the forests), and putting together the data it is known that the first aboriginal tribes who told this “myth” or “legend” to the Portuguese and Spanish colonizers, back in 1560, are not only Brazilian, since it crosses the borders of this country into its neighbors, with different names such as segamai, mapinguay, chudiachaque, diablo, mao de pilao, isnashi, pé de garrafa, salvaje, lobizomen, curupirá, anhanjá, juma, paçalobo, etc.

These have been collected in Bolivia, Colombia, Peru, Venezuela, and Brazil, within the Amazon, and from Paraguay in the Gran Chaco region, and from Argentina in Patagonia.

The so-called American mammalian megafauna dominated the entire continent after the disappearance of the dinosaurs, until the end of the Lower Pleistocene (about 10,000 years ago), in which the still unresolved mystery of their extinction remains unclear to anyone.

The appearance of primitive man in South America, estimated between 30,000 and 20,000 years ago or more, would suggest a Dantesque scene where cave-dwelling hunters faced these great animals to survive at that time, something unlikely so far.

My account does not try to be scientific, because I am not, I simply express my truth and reach probable or approximate conclusions, and I try to illustrate the moments I lived so that you can better understand them. There are petroglyphs (prehistoric rock drawings) from between 17,000 and 12,000 years ago, in which hunts of large animals appear, without specifying exactly which

species they were. Tribes later passed on the information as cultural traditions, and the white man transformed them into “legends and myths,” generalizing them. Put another way, the native did not invent a “legend,” he simply told his truth through time, and this was taken by the colonizers and their successors as superstition. The same observation is made by the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1978) and Santiago Mora in his book “Amazonía – Pasado y presente de un territorio remoto”, Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá (2006).

The earliest accounts of “legends” obtained date from 1560, collected by Father Anchieta; 1589 by Fernao Cardim; 1640 by Laet; 1641 by Acuña, from Nava, Cariaba, and Tupi tribes, and later others such as Karitianas, Ticunas, Desánas, Tumucumaques, Peruvian Incas, Machiguengas, and Aymaras. The ones that predominate are those that speak about the Curupirá and Mapinguarí, and with great similarity those of the Chudiachaque or Chullachaqui in Peru, described by the Peruvian Incas.

In 1786 Matías Kramer recorded comments from Brother Antunes (missionary) such as “the death of the bandeirantes by the beasts.”

The different “legends” say that they like mango trees, that in the month of March they descend to the Amazon basin, they describe their howl, that they are bipeds—enough to confuse them with a giant ape—and ending in our time, disfigured, with a mouth in the stomach that devours men, etc.

Locals even estimate an enormous difference between them, as if the Curupirá were a hairy child with backward feet, depicted in different ways. The same happens with the case of the Mapinguarí and the Chullachaqui. I even believe more identities have been created in recent years, reaching the point of children’s cartoons.

Books with varied perspectives reproduce generalized aspects of the subject throughout the world; for example, cryptozoology blogs, which contain a whole range of “approved monsters” by testimony, and with a large “wanted” sign, written by people with more than a positive feeling, using against traditional scientists a good argument: “the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence”; or defending the idea that the multiple eyewitnesses are themselves probable evidence of some of the questioned cases, and that they deserve to be investigated, even if the depictions offered differ in appearance.

Another format of the “legend” is given by the writer Isabel Allende in her book “City of the Beasts”, where she takes the stories, preserves in her “tale” several real aspects of these animals and their captivating value, and then transforms it in her personal way.

Also the Brazilian Vassia Silveira published a book in 2009, narrating her childhood in Acre, where the entire population spoke of and feared the Mapinguarí.

There in Rio Branco there is also a statue in Chico Mendes Park, which would erroneously depict this animal, and another in the Paragominas Environmental Park, in the state of Pará.

The Acre area is the region with the most data, including the border side of Bolivia and Peru, and municipalities in the west of the state of Amazonas.

In the botanical zoo of Belém do Pará there is also a statue, but of the Curupirá, depicting a child with backward feet.



Statue of the Mapiinguarí in Rio Branco, Acre, Brazil



Statue of the Mapiinguarí in Belém do Pará, Brazil



Statue of the Curupirá in Belém do Pará, Brazil

The numerous monographs on the Internet with opinions for and against this case, and the countless adventurers and scientific expeditions from various countries that have already attempted at least to obtain an image, or to find traces of any kind that might show something in this puzzle, are too many.

There is also the account of eight hunters who claim to have killed this type of animal in Acre, Amazonas, Mato Grosso, and Pará, including my own.

I have not found information from the neighboring countries that encompass part of the Amazon.

I have read somewhere that Brazil currently has 225 indigenous societies, scattered within different natural areas. The green area of the country, which includes the Amazon, Pantanal, and Atlantic Forest biomes, represents 49% of its total surface.



Biome Map of Brazil

Although all these indigenous societies descend in common from the same original human group, and for this reason one might think that the “legend” was born thousands of years ago within that first group, it does not fit with the current testimonial accounts of our “modern” indigenous peoples from the last few hundred years.

I think that the so-called legends do indeed come from the ancient natives, but there are details of later events that, by their content, should not be considered as part of their ancient cultures or traditions, but rather as experiences of the different current tribes.

Santiago Mora of the Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá, says: “These are not stories that move in a simple, linear, and organized time, from a firm and clear present: the here and now. It is a story in all times that often goes back and forth, changes direction, and is happening in the here and now, which is part of the past as revealed by multiple signs that can be continually read in the environment. A world that, because of its complexity, was only called a ‘hoax and tangled superstition.’ Some anthropologists like Claude Lévi-Strauss saw a different way of perceiving reality: ‘a way of thinking that implies that if one is not able to understand the whole, one cannot explain anything’ (1978:17).”

The accounts of the ancient indigenous people state, for example, in the version of the Curupirá or the Mapinguarí, that they feed on mangroves

(ecosystem), and in modern accounts, that they feed on mango leaves or fruits, among others.

These trees were brought by the Portuguese and the Spanish to their colonies (15th and 16th centuries respectively) within the tropical zone. It is a fruit native to India (2000 BC), Asia, and today more than 22 different types are cultivated in various countries, with a maturation period of three months, and during the rainy season its tree grows, and in the dry season it flowers and bears fruit (from September to March). So taking the indigenous accounts, it is deduced that they cannot be older than the 15th century, simply because these fruit trees did not exist here.

For some, the Pleistocene is placed between 25 million and ten thousand years ago (9600 BC), and then the Holocene begins up to the present, and it is said that America has been inhabited by humans for about thirty thousand years or more. Dates have been established for Pleistocene hunters, for example, Serra do Capibara, Brazil, 12000 BC, men of Ayacucho, Peru, 17000 BC, men of Guitarrero, Maquegua, Peru, 13000 to 11000 BC; so, on the one hand, we know that in the Pleistocene the dominant animals were the large mammals, among them the great ground sloths, of which more than 50 related species lived there, including megatheriums, mylodons, scelidotheriums, eremotheriums, nothrotheriums and megalonyx; and on the other hand, the coexistence in time of primitive humans, right at the end of the Pleistocene, when 80% of the megafauna (above 44 kg.) in South America was lost, between 16000 and 10000 years ago, according to Roberts 1998, Webb 1984, etc. The definition of megafauna depends on each author: for some, from 5 kg., for others from 44 kg., and others from 120 kg.

But some cases of survival of megafauna even into the Holocene must also be considered, scientifically verified, reported by Ibsen de Gusmao Câmara in his writing titled “Reflections on Extinctions in the Pleistocene”, which states: “on the Caribbean islands some terrestrial sloths seem to have survived into the Holocene”; McKenna & Bell 1997 “Synocnus in the Holocene” from Hispaniola; and in Cuba, bones of an undetermined genus were dated to 3700 years old by non-radiological methods (MacPhee 1997); “in the Buena Esperanza cave, southern Chile, coprolites (excrement) of mylodon with an age of 5300 years, through carbon 14” (Sutcliffe 1985); “a woolly mammoth on Wrangel Island, northern Siberia, between 7000 and 3700 years old” (Lister & Bahn 1995); “Hippidium and Nothrotherium in South America” (McKenna & Bell 1997), where it is even expressed that the datings of these bone remains logically do not indicate that they were or had been the last of their species.

This also appears in the book “Vertebrate Paleontology: Major Themes and Scientific Contributions” by Gallo V., Brito P.M., Silva H.M.A. and Figueiredo F.J., pages 153 to 171, presenting several theories about these extinctions, one of which simplifies the complex case and is strengthened today,

with more specialists and technologies available that analyze climatology, distribution of plant species and environmental factors, mainly paleotemperatures: “The Pleistocene is interpreted as one of those interglacial periods with complex climatic variations, even in tropical regions, giving rise to the ‘Pleistocene refuges theory’, according to which successive fragmentations of tropical forests would have generated refuges for the flora and fauna of the time, promoting the emergence of new species and the increase of biodiversity, due to the isolation of forested massifs.”

In other words, it is understood that climate alteration in the tropical area would not have been uniform, allowing the survival of flora and fauna in isolated areas.

The same theory is considered in the Ecuadorian Amazon, containing the Yasuni National Park (amazoniaporlaveda.org), and in Peru with the Yanachaga-Chemillén National Park, as well as the Manú National Park, declared a world heritage site by UNESCO (peruecologico.com).

The newer Amazonian area further south, in Bolivia, includes the Noel Kempff Mercado and Madidi National Parks, with an age of 3000 years, demonstrated recently (T. J. Killen, 1998).

This theory is currently both defended and attacked, according to the opinions of different authors; meanwhile, there is evidence that typical savanna animals (tropical plain) or those incompatible with the dense forest environment, such as vicuñas, llamas, glyptodonts and large terrestrial sloths, inhabited during phases of the Pleistocene areas of the western Amazon, now covered by forests (Ranzi 2000); “therefore the evidence of significant climatic variations suggests that species characteristic of rainforests survived in different humid places during glacial episodes, where cold and dry conditions prevailed, followed by the return of rainforest development” (Suguio 1999); and finally in the book “Quaternary Extinctions – A Prehistoric Revolution” (Martin & Klein 1984), where 45 specialists presented their ideas on the enigma in question, without at the end of the text offering a satisfactory answer.

For some authors, it is inadmissible that scattered human populations, wielding primitive stone weapons, could have completely extinguished a wide diversity of large mammals.

I have also seen several programs that propose defining the disappearance of ground sloths by causes of a predator such as the saber-toothed tiger, something that my encounter with this species tells me would be impossible for the feline, to capture these powerful and foul-smelling animals, since their chemical weapon alone would have been enough to deter it, as well as their strength and speed, greater than that of any carnivorous bear, which would be the closest comparison, contrary to what a modern sloth is.

If a skunk scares away a cougar, imagine the same smell but from a much larger animal moving in a herd. It is almost impossible that any predator could face it, at least in the Amazon where today the onça (jaguar) is considered the top predator.

So, after imagining in time what the Pleistocene was and returning to the present, where scientific reports and data are not conclusive on the causes of the massive extinctions, theorizing about the survival of the different species that existed and their readaptation to habitats that were not their own, by which they managed to reach our times, this, to me, is correct.

The influence on biodiversity, in the case of large frugivores, is the dispersal of seeds by consuming many fruits, very important at that time to ensure the survival of these refuges, by multiplying the flora of the place, and today there are estimated calculations of that influence on current ecosystems, of all “known” species.

The remains of an impressive variety of species found demonstrate the success that large mammals had, and already in his time Darwin collected megatherium bone remains in Argentina, where there have always been reports of strange or prehistoric animals. In Patagonia, Florentino Ameghino in 1898/99 obtained reports of sightings he considered reliable; also in North America there are reports with more than 200 sightings of the legendary Swamp Beast, with television presentations in *MonsterQuest* by cryptozoologist Loren Coleman, describing characteristics very similar to South American “legends”, and which perhaps one day may be proven to be the same animals that managed to survive in both Americas.

In Brazil, remains of these animals were found in the states of Bahia, São Paulo, Rio Grande do Sul, Ceará, Minas Gerais and Acre. In the Colombian Amazon, findings of *Megalonyx* bone remains along with other xenarthrans—*pilosa* were confirmed (Universidad Nacional de Colombia).

The Amazon River, the main fluvial artery of South America, was formed as a transcontinental river 11 million years ago, and acquired its current size 2.4 million years ago, according to British and Dutch researchers, in an article published in the journal “Geology” (paleontologianoticiosa.com/2009).

Thus, it could be affirmed that the coexistence of megafauna and Pleistocene refuges in the Amazonian area are demonstrated; therefore the evolution of the flora we see today in this jungle should have allowed such survival of Pleistocene fauna, without doubt, with characteristics of adaptation to this habitat.

Chapter Three: *Megalonyx wheatleyi*

Surely I am missing more information, books and data, but I believe I have clearly expressed up to this point the necessary arguments to say that the animals I have referred to are called *Megalonyx* (large claw) *wheatleyi*, which is a terrestrial sloth classified as follows:

(Upper Pleistocene)

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Mammalia

Order: Pilosa

Suborder: Xenarthra

Family: Megalonychidae

Subfamily: Megalonychinae

Genus: *Megalonyx*

(Gervais 1855)



Megalonyx at the American Museum of Natural History, New York

There were more than 50 genera of sloths, but only 4 or 5 recognized classes. I have not been able to find images of all of them, since for some of them only very few bone remains have been obtained, or no graphic images exist.

In the comparison I make of my personal sighting with the images I obtained, I have focused on the (genus) *Megalonyx wheatleyi*, which is placed within the group Xenarthra (strange joints) Edentata (toothless), with molars specialized for folivorous feeding (belonging to the suborder Folivora), although for some they would be omnivores, an opinion I share.

Other texts place this genus within a subfamily (Megalonychinae), which will be a task for specialists, since for me, just a mere witness, **THEY ARE VERY MUCH ALIVE.**

Adult males weigh over 500 kg, females around 300 kg, and juveniles (howlers) 100 kg

I could clearly notice that the walking of the young is more amusing than that of the adults, due to their swaying gait.

Those who say they have backward feet are mistaken, since they walk on their knuckles and it seems, when looking at them depending on distance and angle, that this is the case. In reality, if observed in a quadruped position from the front, one would see that their claws are bent backward and slightly to the sides, and that they also have a prominent heel or calcaneus on their hind legs (see photo), which also leads to confusion. I seemed to notice that the claws of the small and young were longer than those of the adults, reminding me of Charlie Chaplin's gait with his short, sideways steps.

I am also convinced that they have several distinct vocalizations, which they use for communication and defense; the howl is defensive, since they have a spectacular sense of smell and it is part of their way of scaring off, seen in testimonial cases, humans. Their call to each other anyone would mistake for frogs.

The great mystery is the odor they emit, whether glandular, parasitic, from excrement or bodily fluids, it really seems to affect those who approach, and in my case I smelled it but was not affected. It is very intense in the herd and from what I saw, it is the trail they all follow.

Moving along the road is an adaptation of large animals to be able to run and move better.

The truth is that for at least 18 kilometers they traveled, and three theories come to my mind about this: it was simply a migration from one territory to another, as civilization was increasingly establishing itself deeper into the jungle, an unrepeatable event; or perhaps due to the strong seismic movements that occurred that year (1985) in Mexico and Chile, since it is known that animals have great perception in these episodes; or perhaps the military activity very close to there, in an area of several square kilometers, called Jungle Warfare Instruction Center (CIGS), which I later learned was the most uninhabited area near Manaus; perhaps they carried out exercises with explosives. In short, hypotheses that come to my mind.

I remember a detail about their neck, very thin and mobile, they stretch and contract it to the point of showing only the head above the shoulders; I define it as “retractable” and I have read that a mammal normally has 7 cervical vertebrae, except for the Bradypodidae which have between 6 and 10; nor will I ever understand why they are defined as “sloths” when at speed (at least these) they are fast and agile in movement, which led me to think that if a gorilla or a brown bear climbs a tree with ease, these would be no less and must do so as well.

The nocturnal habit is an adaptation according to my deduction: for thousands of years they were daytime feeders, without predators, until the appearance of man, unlimited and territorial predator, which made them change their habit to nighttime.

They know the human scent and appear while we are sleeping. They mostly move in the rain and darkness when no one is in the jungle (we must remember that in this tropical zone, there are six months of heavy, daily rainfall). In the summer, they must stay in cool places (like mangroves), feeding on fish stranded in the swamps at the end of the rainy season. This would be a very typical behavior for certain bears, and acting as omnivores is the most logical thing to do.

Much has also been written about the resistance of their skin to arrows and even certain types of shotgun ammunition. In fact, a hide found in a cave in southern Chile (the Cave of the Mylodon) demonstrated that, at least in this species, there was a protective layer of small bones beneath the skin. These bones resembled those forming the shell of a glyptodont, though they were not fused together. This evidence showed that the hide belonged to a ground sloth and that it was impenetrable to arrows, as demonstrated in a YouTube video, due to the combined thickness of the skin, fat, and bone.

In the genus *Megalonyx* there existed many related species such as *M. curvidens*, *M. gigas*, *M. jeffersonii*, *M. ereptodon priscus*, *M. brachicephalus*, *M. californius*, *M. dissimilis*, *M. hogani*, *M. laqueatus*, *M. leidyi*, *M. milleri*, *M. sierrensis*, *M. leptostomus*, *Morotherium leptonyx*, *M. mathisi*, *M. rohrmanni*, *M. wheatleyi*, *M. loxodon*, *M. scalper*, *M. sphenodon*, *M. tortulus*, *Ahytherium aureum*, *Megalonychops primigenius*, *Xenocnus cearesis*, *Ocnopus gracilis*, and more, which astonishingly demonstrates the variety and great number of species successfully developed, that inhabited the entire American continent.

In my case I have no doubt that these sloths exist and I try to think about what makes these animals different or what they do differently, that allows them to evade being caught for hundreds of years.

To date no image of them has been obtained, only visual testimonies of their existence.

It would be logical to think that they are very few and scattered over an area larger than all of Europe, but I do not believe this is the case. This animal demonstrates a cunning that prevents us from catching it, and that has adapted to avoid us, but in my view it needs to be close to humans to survive, since it teaches its young our scent in order to recognize danger and keep their distance.

If we think, for example, that only a small group of these sloths had survived the Pleistocene, in the thousands of years that have passed without being preyed upon, we would now have a very good number of dispersed specimens, since past records prove how successful they were and the variety they produced.

Comparatively, it could also be supposed that if current bears manage to survive the most adverse climates with their adaptation to hibernation for several months, why not think that during the Pleistocene glaciation the great sloths also managed to resort to hibernation and then abandon it in a tropical habitat?

I've always believed that some adaptations in species can be reversed when needed. Modern genetics shows that genetic changes don't vanish; they're simply "deactivated" by evolution. Scientists can now "reactivate" them in a lab

in a fraction of the time it would take nature—hundreds or thousands of years—proving that it's a completely plausible process.

A great example of this is a biologist who demonstrated that in a desert area, when a drought hits, certain crocodiles hide for long periods in small, 15-meter-deep caves. While this seems impossible, she proved to her skeptical colleagues that this is a true example of adaptability (Mauritanian crocodiles - 2009).

Chapter Four: First Expedition

At the beginning of 2009, I was searching for information related (as always) to these animals, when one of my daughters suggested contacting Oren and telling him about my experiences.

Twenty-four years had already passed since then, and I thought it would be a great change for me, and maybe there was a possibility of personally meeting this man I had admired for so long. I decided to contact him through the Internet, and after sending 8 unanswered messages to different employees of the Goeldi Museum, Oren's workplace, someone finally replied that he no longer worked there, but gave me his email address.

Trying to reach him, one day he replied to a brief explanation I had sent, with evident interest, and gave me his Skype contact, and one night we agreed to talk. We began the communication without the webcam, which made me doubt when I couldn't see him and heard a young voice, and I asked him please if he could turn on his camera because I wanted to see him.

I had seen an older picture of him online and had an idea of what he looked like, so then we were seeing and talking to each other, and he seemed a little older than his real age (he was born in 1954), with white hair, thin, and apparently a tall man.

I smiled nervously because the person I was meeting was someone I had been following for years due to his investigative work on the "legend." He was the only person in the world who believed, as I did, in the existence of these animals and was fighting against the widespread skepticism, even from his colleagues. A man dedicated to science, who had discovered several bird species, written books, collaborated with Nature Conservancy, and had worked for many years at the Goeldi Museum, an institution with hundreds of scientific works in favor of nature.

I could see his enormous library behind him. He spoke slowly and in correct Spanish about the impossibility of finding the remains of the animal I had shot at. He explained to me about the degradation and vegetation growth of the area, which was an option I also considered likely. After that, there was no further contact. I had a list of questions and data I thought were vital, which I now pour into these pages, but I never had the chance to share them with him, and he never replied to my messages again.

I felt such disappointment, an immense sense of emptiness; I couldn't understand what had happened. I thought he hadn't believed me or that my data was too old and useless to him. In short, I was stunned and confused, and that night I couldn't sleep.

With my brother Sergio, we visited the local museum and were received by the mammalogist working there, who explained to us that, beyond the interest such information could arouse, our national museums generally lack the financial support for expeditions abroad. He said he would try to get help from one of his contacts and would call us if there was any news. We never heard back.

Soon after, I managed to turn despair into motivation to make an attempt on my own: I'm stubborn, and when something gets into my head and interests me, I try to achieve my goals. I knew all this would reignite my adventurous and determined spirit.

I solved the financial problem I had to travel alone to the Amazon in a short time, which was very hard for my wife and family, who feared for my physical and "psychological" safety. I set a thirty-day limit for this first attempt, made phone calls to contacts in the area, used Google Earth to check changes in the region, and bought a night-vision camera to capture an image if I managed to track them.

I left with more enthusiasm than certainty, since 24 years had passed and things change, both in the city and in the jungle. I had only flown once in my life, and now I had four flights ahead of me: two out and two back, Ezeiza – São Paulo and São Paulo – Manaus, where I arrived at midnight.

Later, I found the old bus station, abandoned and forgotten. A guard told me it had barely operated for years, with only a couple of companies still using it as a departure point to the interior, and that a new terminal was being planned.

Manaus has about 2 million inhabitants and is a mix of old city in parts, with few modern tall buildings, more spread out, with a huge number of people living semi-flooded that year, due to the greatest flooding in the last 50 years of the Amazon River itself and all its tributaries.

I lay down on a bench in this old terminal, and memories came flooding back. So much time had passed, and everything outside this station had changed too much. At dawn, the first buses to the interior began to arrive, and I took one that took me to AM-10. I got off in front of the farm of my former employers, who kindly welcomed me and allowed me to stay there for a few days after I explained the purpose of my visit.

Teresa, Michio, Kodi, and Norikatsu, a good and hardworking Japanese-descendant family, respected in the colony. The farm no longer had any of the employees from those days, but it had progressed tremendously and now employed many family groups.

I remembered some words in Japanese and said them, which made them laugh. I told them about my life and reminded them that they had been very

good employers to me, always saying “dozó” (please) whenever they asked me to do something. That simple habit of asking kindly was not something one often finds in a workplace.

My “barraca” neighbors helped me, lending me a hammock to sleep better, a cooking pot, and a machete. I planned to sleep during the day so I could walk in the late afternoons and part of the night. I noticed the area was more populated than before, the farms had tighter fences, and people spoke of insecurity even here.

Those days I reunited with my friend Heraldo Becerra and his family, still living a kilometer from the farm, though what had once been a makeshift stall was now a simple but nice roadside restaurant, as the road had become much busier. We recalled those times when one could see all kinds of animals and might even come across a painted onça (jaguar). I asked him if he had seen or heard of strange animals there, and he said no, but he remembered my stories from back then.

I kept searching for two weeks without finding any trace or story about them. The only stories were about me, since practically no one believed my words—not even Brandão, a farm worker, ex-military man, and practical hunter, who out of curiosity accompanied me one night, but we returned empty-handed.

Every now and then, I'd set up the small tent my friend, Omar the hardware store owner, had lent me, and rest for a bit. I always had some food, my camera, and a machete slung across my back. The blisters on my feet wanted me to stop, but I'd just pierce them and keep going.

They allowed me to search the neighboring farm where I believed the animal I had shot at had fallen back then, though I knew how hard it would be to find anything. Even a tiny bone would have calmed my anxiety.

I tried different types of “waits,” staying still in a hideout in the bushes or up in trees, hours in silence sharpening my senses, alone... Only one farmer told me that his dog, despite being fierce, had recently seemed scared of something near the back of his farm by a water stream. I went there by day and night but only found small nocturnal animals.

Every time the workers saw me return, they joked or smiled, asking me for explanations about the animals, but I didn't try to convince them.

In those days, before leaving, I decided to talk with Brandão, the most serious and hunter-like of them. I found him with an older man, and I noticed something strange in Brandão's face: while I spoke, he looked at the ground or sideways, as the man advised him to believe me and be careful in his hunts. Then the old man spoke and told him: “accept the Argentine's advice.” I looked at the old man uncertainly and asked if he knew anything about the animals.

Then Brandão told me that this man was his father, who was visiting, and that he had told him to believe me, that his grandfather had seen them once in Alenqué, Pará State, where they lived.

Then Brandão confessed that he hadn't believed me, but if his father said it and spoke of his grandfather, then he was sure it was true, and he even thanked me. I left with that small joy in my mind, the satisfaction of sharing this truth with someone else.

The next day, I went to an Internet café in Manaus to arrange an earlier return to Mar del Plata, but I wanted to find some local support willing to share this search. I needed more logistics and money to cover the area up to a nearby town, or maybe a little further. I had other places in mind, a bit more distant, but it would be impossible on this trip.

Having dinner in a roadside bar, I saw on TV an adventurer who showed great affection and interest in animals, Richard Rasmussen, who had a segment in another program on the Red Record, broadcast nationwide in Brazil. This channel was in São Paulo, so it would be on my way, and I decided to try to speak with him personally.

The first thing I did upon arriving in São Paulo was buy a map of the city, which is so huge, and until then I had only been inside Guarulhos airport, nothing more. I was told that Record was in the Barra Funda neighborhood, near the metro, and it was easy to get there, but that day I achieved nothing.

The next day I got Richard's phone number, and his secretary Yeni told me he would be back the next day from a trip, and that I must call him in the morning. That night I looked up all the videos of his program "Selvagem ao Extremo." I called him in the morning, and he answered. We talked, and he asked if it might be spectacled bears (ursos-de-óculos), and I assured him it wasn't.

We met at a gas station near his house, and I couldn't believe this famous person was so simple, friendly, respectful, and sincere. He was accompanied by his wife, Sabrina Martins, and told me he only had a few minutes and had to leave.

The conversation turned out so interesting for both of us that an hour passed, and my enthusiasm had infected him. He knew of stories and reports on the matter, that this was possible and real, and asked me to give him a month to prepare something. But for me, just seeing genuine interest in his eyes was enough.

Before leaving, I asked Sabrina to film us together. I missed my flight, but I couldn't let this opportunity pass, and nothing else mattered.

A month later, we contacted each other online, and he told me he had signed a contract with channel SBT at that time and had to prepare his new program “Aventura Selvagem”. But since he had given me his word and saw that my interest wasn’t financial, he decided that for the exploration he would send his trusted man, Lourenço Depizzol Junior, “o ratão,” a biologist, and his support contact in Manaus, businessman Pedro Ferreira Fernández Neto.



Lourenço and Pedro on the expedition to the Amazon

Chapter Five: Second Expedition

The agreed-upon day arrived. I loaded my data files, hoping that this time my luck would be better, and set off on my second trip of the year. I arrived on a delayed flight to São Paulo and met Claudio Brito, Richard's cameraman, with whom we went to the TXAI Productions studio, set up inside Richard's house.

We were welcomed by Sabrina, housewife and team photographer, and she introduced me to the rest: Jane (Yeni), Carlos (biologist), Lourdes (biologist), Adriana, Favio (video editor), Brian (collaborator), and Lourenço, my travel companion. They showed me the beautiful rustic condominium they had, with a huge collection of indigenous, handcrafted objects, as well as unusual pets, while waiting for Richard to arrive. Soon we began preparing the itinerary and later Richard himself prepared a delicious dinner.

At 5 in the morning we left for the Campinas airport bound for Manaus, with almost a 4-hour flight, which I used to exchange ideas and bond with Lourenço—something that, regardless of the outcome of the expedition, was already an unforgettable event for me.

We landed at the international airport of Manaus where Pedro, our local contact, awaited us, an intelligent man very willing to help in every way, always with a vehicle and his driver Franky at our disposal. We temporarily stayed at the Gero Tours offices, and Pedro introduced us to his partner and friend Gero, and the company staff—employees, guides, drivers—all very attentive.

We analyzed the options and Pedro let me know that the area I had chosen, parallel between the Rio Preto da Eva, AM-10, and the Amazon River, is a military area (CIGS) and we could not enter, so we had to discard it. We agreed to explore the surrounding areas and the first farm where I had been, and meet with local residents to gather information on sightings or contacts with strange animals.

We spoke with a good number of locals, which showed the mixture of beliefs between family anecdotes and different myths many people recount, as if they had really happened yesterday. Some testimonies we gathered included that of Edson Roberto, guide and biologist, who spoke of a hunt 800 kilometers from there, near the Aripuim River (AM), where one of the three hunters of an animal with the characteristics we were looking for still lives—though verification would have to wait until the next expedition due to the remoteness of the place.

We were also surprised by the account of Conrado, a guide for 15 years, who twice saw an unknown animal near the Urubú and Arara rivers, a place we later visited after two hours of boat travel. Conrado is a Guaiminí Indian, raised

in British Guiana, with extensive practical guiding knowledge, who once collaborated with the Australian Steve Irwin on a major Amazon expedition.

Another convincing person was Mr. José, of indigenous descent, a former boat captain and recognized ex-hunter by several people, above all sincere in his speech, who recounted an encounter with an animal that struck him during a night hunt, which he described as a curupirá, giving us the place and date of the event. Another person told us that in the CIGS area a soldier had shot at what turned out to be an unknown animal, though we could not confirm this.

We consulted Rosemary, a paleontologist from UFAM, about what types of bone remains had been found, and she told us they were few and related to megatheriums in Eirunepé (AM). We also heard of sightings in Alenqué (PA) from Brandão's father, also mentioned by Haroldo, who is from that same place.

We knew the 25 days would be active and the distances enormous, so we selected the closest and most recent cases. The data led us to Itacoatiara, 266 kilometers from Manaus along the same AM-10 route. There we spoke with staff from the municipal environmental office and employees of the lumber company MIL LTD.: forestry engineer Joao C., group leader Brasileiro with 14 years in tree surveys, Antonio C. with 9 years, tree identifier, and Joao M., with 9 years, group leader. The accounts went back 5 years, concerning a situation inexplicable to some, simple to others, and there were those who did not want to talk. Depending on who tells it, the story goes more or less like this:

A camp named "Caribí" was set up in a new sector within the logging company's area, to select specimens as a preliminary step before logging, with a team of 45 people (others say over 30).

The crew, said their leader, constantly heard strange noises like pounding on the ground, describing them as a military march, but they could never see what caused them, always circling around the group. They were perceived both day and night, along with voices described as if frogs were croaking all together. They began to feel some latent confusion or physical unease during the first two nights, and on the third, he said they were all sick and lying in their hammocks, no one wanted dinner, when suddenly the generator stopped, and a very unpleasant situation began—they felt grabbed under their hammocks and held down forcefully, causing the whole group to panic.

Some said they saw hairy animals pulling them as if trying to drag them, and the screaming was total, while for some inexplicable reason they could not get up normally. Others said they were struck and literally flew through the air, that some force pulled them out of their hammocks, and when they regrouped, they abandoned the camp in the darkness, all holding hands, to another camp in another sector, and called the forestry engineer, who ordered them to return, but no one obeyed.

They stayed there that night and apparently some people were injured, though not seriously, just bruises, later treated at the city hospital. This was later mentioned on the local radio and heard by the whole town.

They also said that during the first day, two employees separately went to the river near the camp. One, standing at the edge of an *igarapé* (a small Amazonian waterway), was violently pushed from behind, falling into the water. The second, arriving there, saw an animal he called *curupirá*, standing on two legs looking into the water.

At that moment the animal noticed the second man's approach and fled into the undergrowth, and the second man saw the first coming out of the water, accusing him of having pushed him, to which the frightened second quickly suggested they leave. They told their group leaders what had happened, but they were not believed, assumed to be a bad joke.

For the engineer this all boiled down to pranksters, which in his view led to the dismissal of two or three identified individuals, while the rest was a collective scare. For the inspector it was an inexplicable event, and in his duty he went and examined the place without conclusions, noting that most of those involved were locals, known as good and hardworking people.

All this information also created different opinions within our small expedition group; Lourenço and Pedro leaned more towards doubt, and I was firmly convinced these were the traces of the animals we were looking for, and fortunately the workers had not been attacked with ferocity—otherwise it would have been a tremendous tragedy. They were only frightened, forced to leave the area where they had been.

The sounds they reported hearing were already familiar to me and, in a different way, they say the same truth I present in this book. That's why I am not surprised by the reports from a nearby region along the same route, where I had seen them a few years earlier on the north bank of the Amazon River heading east, the corridor they use. This would demonstrate, if it was the same group, that they are migrating from areas reached by human expansion, and will continue to do so; but if so, the kilometers separating them from us are not many and the chances of finding them would be close. The pressures they suffer are no different from the rest of the native fauna, forced into successive migrations.

I want to make it very clear that it is not my intention to harm any person, company, or organization, but only to search for evidence to prove a truth, a reality that must be investigated due to its great importance.

Chapter Six: “Errare Humanum Est”

The logging company MIL LTD. (1997), AM-10 route kilometer 227, with 122,000 hectares, part of the Swiss group The Precious Woods, with the Rain Forest Alliance’s Smartwood program and under the criteria of the Forest Stewardship Council or “green seal” to operate in the Amazon for 25 years of cyclical harvesting, is also the first forestry company in the world to sign an agreement with Greenpeace (2000), for environmental monitoring and supervision, standing out above other environmental groups.

Under the control and study of national, state, municipal, and civil organizations such as INCRA, INPA, EMBRAPA, ITEAM, IMAFLORA, IBAMA, IPAAM, and the Municipal Environment Secretariat of Itacoatiara, with satellite monitoring (CELOS), annual audits, public reports on the Internet, mapping, traceability chains, impact studies (flora, fauna, soil, water, adjacent communities, etc.), it is a complete example of a working methodology with commitment and responsibility from all involved sectors, both the company and the official controlling bodies and NGOs.

The public information on the Internet about this model project is quite clear and expressive, regarding the more than 52 crucial points the company had to pass and must comply with.

In an inventory of approximately 60 tree species, only between 27 and 35 are harvested, and of the 122,000 hectares of the first two farms they had (they would later acquire 6 more), 5,000 hectares are for absolute conservation (untouchable) and permanent preservation areas.

Regarding the groups interested in the consultation processes and results, the report says: “Ensure that the public is aware and informed about the evaluation process and its objectives, assist the field evaluation team in identifying potential topics, and create opportunities for the public to dissent and act upon the evidence evaluated.”

In the 2002 public report (p. 68, 6.2) it says: “strengthen the identification, piloting, protection of rare habitats and/or those relevant for local biodiversity conservation (rare birds, etc.), sites of anthropological, historical importance, etc.”

On page 69, 6.2 it says: “communicate to surrounding communities and forestry team workers, preferably in consonance with environmental agencies or entities, information on the importance for present and future generations of conserving these rare or endangered species, and their occurrence sites.” And this is only a small part of the mechanisms available for this forestry plan model.

I insist the plan is very good, currently the best available, and my opinions are specifically directed at the particular case mentioned and its consequent errors.

I assume that point 6.2 on page 69, which anyone anywhere in the world can check online, is a clause that was not fulfilled, and the difficulty is in proving this. But if the Caribí camp workers gave explanations that seemed “illogical or impossible,” who should prove what the real truth was under those circumstances?

If there was what they call a “quebra-quebra” (violent disturbance), and this appears in the company’s public report (online) for that year (2005), how is it possible that they all left together, holding hands, in the middle of the night, abandoning the camp, and later 18 of them incriminating themselves?

Why is the workers’ word not credible?

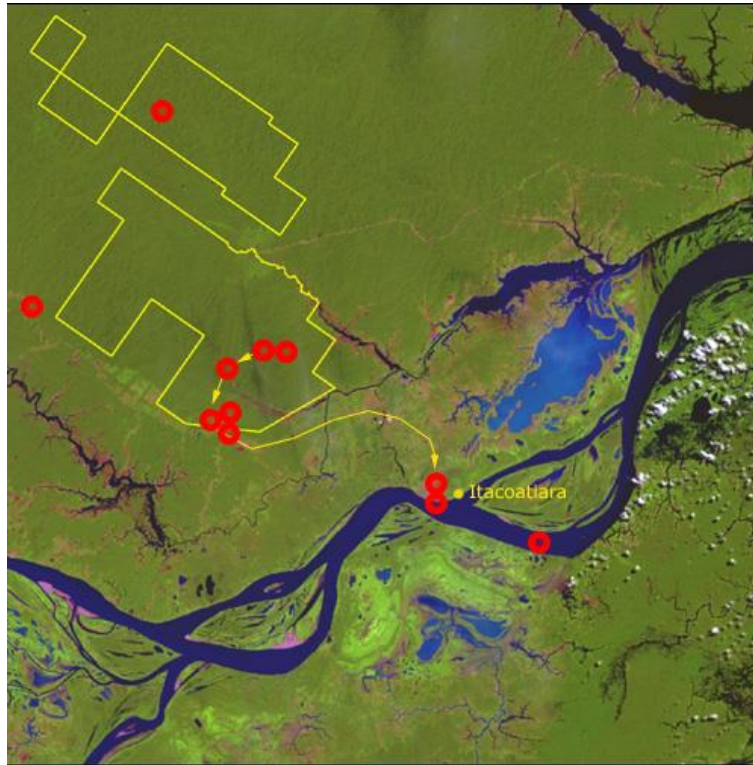
Why does the forestry engineer say (and I have witnesses) that he fired 2 or 3 “pranksters,” when in reality 18 workers were dismissed “justifiably” (the self-incriminated), and some of the rest, still working there, continue to affirm what they said about that unusual event that night? For what purpose would they keep insisting?

What could happen to the company?

No matter how fragile the “green seal” might be, the area involved would become a reserve for these animals, and this should not affect that model project.

Otherwise, it would demonstrate flaws in the application of prior research for deforestation permits, and ignorance of the full biological reality of the forest, which certainly is the case.

And I don’t think there is any specialist in the world who would consider the forest fully known, knowing it is a natural biological powerhouse that produces species or subspecies constantly over time, and it doesn’t take hundreds of years for that.



MIL Ltda. Logging Area, between Manaus and Itacoatiara

We transform the environment. Hundreds of species feed on our garbage in overpopulated cities, not to mention climate change, without straying from the subject.

No one could imagine the possibility that a group of animals considered extinct, or not yet properly identified, might be or have passed through an area supposedly subjected to every kind of ecological review. For the workers, the surprise and panic they suffered in the face of the unknown, and worse still, being disbelieved and dismissed; for the company director, basing himself on his forestry experience and a limited view of the existing and still-unknown fauna, especially in the area in which he operates.

Therefore, this is what I think of both sides and the criteria applied in response to such a situation.

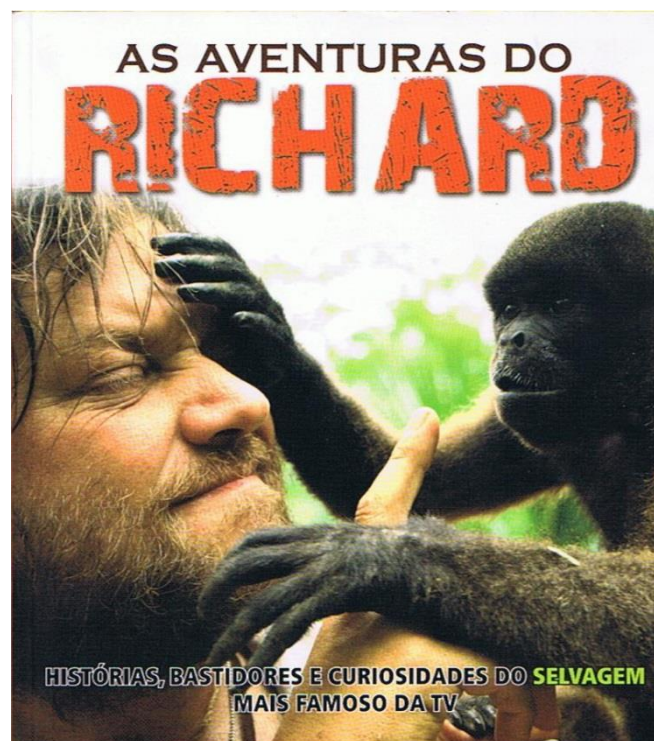
From this trip, I regret not having had more time to seek out more of the involved personnel and to personally review the scene of the events—a request I am now making public. I also request the support of individuals or entities with scientific aims to continue what I affirm is real and demonstrable, if the necessary resources are provided.

Everything described and hypothesized in these pages is my sole responsibility and personal opinion, making clear and respecting the personal criteria of Richard Rasmussen and the members of the expedition, Lourenço

and Pedro, which may differ or not, with all the appreciation and respect these good people deserve, and to whom, for their demonstrated effort and collaboration on this expedition, I will be grateful for the rest of my life.

Especially to Richard, who believes in my words and kept his promise to carry out this adventurous search, even though his public commitments prevented him from dedicating the time he would have liked, for his great adventurous spirit, and for giving me his full support and friendship, telling me that on his travels he will try to gather information about contacts with these beings in the different regions he visits.

Once the expedition ended and back at Richard's house, all the recorded material, data, and opinions were analyzed, and we agreed to stay in contact and continue investigating with time, measuring the possibilities. Before my return he gifted me one of his books with a spontaneous dedication that said: "To my friend Luis, may the Mapinguarí be the 'godfather' of a new story in our lives. Like me, you are someone who believes and pursues his ideals. Hugs, sincerely, Richard."



Cover of Richard Rasmussen's book

I returned home, to my family and the emotion this brings, with the idea of being able to take another trip soon and continue the investigation.

My work in construction only allows me daily survival, so it's clear how difficult it is for me to plan something like this. That is why I try to seek support for this cause, which led me to write this account and attempt to gain acceptance from some institution, company, media outlet, government entity, etc., to whom I sent messages with very few favorable responses—those emails I treasure, keeping hope for the future.

Most point to complicated economic situations, and others simply to disbelief in my comments: David Conway Oren, Goeldi Museum, Ceire Clark (NatGeo TV), Rosa Taques (Rede Record), Damián Romero (Scaglia Museum), Louise Emmons (Smithsonian Museum), Grupo Paleo Argentina, Grupo Criptozoólogos (Essencia 21), Malena Gonzalez (Discovery TV), Doug Hajicek (History Channel), M. Superina, president of Xenarthra species (Conicet/Asag), Loren Coleman (Monster Quest), Group Sloth World, Fundación Azara, Fapesp.org.br, MDQ Producciones (Argentina), palacioplanalto.gov.br – Claudio Soares Rocha, greenpeace.org.ar.

Chapter Seven: Third Expedition

I had barely finished reorganizing myself at work when my older brother Alberto told me that a friend of his, from Paraguay, was interested in my search, since she had seen, many years ago (around 1973), animals with the characteristics I described.

This friend, raised on the outskirts of Costa Alegre, between Iturbe and Caazapá, near the Tebicuary River, swore to me that she and her siblings saw those large animals, and that locals in the area left in fear because of the roars, as well as because they threw large branches at people trying to pass on horseback along that forested path.

She also recounted that her late father was a hunter, and that he roamed everywhere with his hunting dogs.

One night while hunting, he felt something in the dark strike his dogs, who fled terrified, and he tried to find out what had done it by approaching the spot where they had been, when something knocked him down, hitting him, with a roar so loud that he curled up in a fetal position covering his ears; that “thing” hurled him through the air against the trees, leaving him semi-conscious.

With several fractured ribs, huge bruises, and tears all over his body, to the point of dragging himself, he made it out of the thicket where someone was able to help him.

This affected him so much that he never again wanted to go hunting, and in recounting it to his children, he revealed that, knowing the local fauna, this was an enormous beast never seen before by him, which some locals called the “devil,” there along the wooded path.

A few months later my brother and his friend made a trip to Paraguay to visit her siblings, and I went with them to take the opportunity to investigate the area; thus we traveled by car throughout the region, and I chose a mountain range further south of the Caaguazú range, very uninhabited, to explore, called Yvyturuzú National Park. On the other side of the first hill there is a village called José Fassardi.

The highest altitude is about 900 meters with small streams descending over cliffs. It is a heavily forested and rugged place, with sections of difficult access. At the foot of the hills, pastures with cattle, sugarcane fields, and crops can be observed.

The region did not yield any trace of the animals. I had also heard certain accounts about the Asunción River, but the area was not well defined, so we

returned to Mar del Plata leaving it for another opportunity, should I obtain more data, though I know there are more possibilities in the Brazilian Amazon.

Chapter Eight: The Image

2010 arrived with family gatherings, the calm of home, and in my mind the idea of beginning to write this book.

To me, this is a journey into the past, where I'm trying to remember every last detail so that the truth of these events can be understood. I am speaking the truth, and I challenge anyone who accuses me of lying or rambling to put me to any test—polygraph or psychological. That's why I've tried to gather as much evidence and scientific deduction as possible. I want to allow for the slightest possibility of certainty, to show that not everything has been said, known, or studied yet, and that this is indeed possible.

In my search for support to continue trying to locate these animals, I contacted a cryptozoology forum, a group of Spanish friends interested in the events: David Heylen Campos, Ángel Dolon Viejo, and Gustavo Sánchez Romero; the latter is a biologist, writer, and has carried out expeditions to the Venezuelan Amazon, searching for certain animals, and he told me that the Yanomami described to him an animal similar to the mapinguarí or curupirá, which they call “owhuama,” telling me he would indicate the area where they saw it.

I left them with my concern of trying to obtain financial support to continue the search and the desire to get in contact again. These young men, passionate about cryptids, participate in forums, radio, TV, and books on these subjects, which is why they were surprised at the detail of sighting a herd—it is something never before mentioned—and there are even those who think of just a handful of living specimens, only of this species, scattered, solitary, somewhere remote in the Amazon.

It is worth mentioning that I have marked on a map a small number of sightings of different types and at different times, speculating that in each marked place there should be a herd like the one I once saw, since I was able to compare sightings separated by more than 3,000 kilometers within the same year, so it could not have been the same group.



Map of some sightings

As an example, I cite that in 1985 near Manaus, they were sighted, and at the same time in Iñapari (Bolivia); or in 2005 the Karatiana tribe (Rondônia – Brazil) saw them, and in Itacoatiara as well; in 1997 in San Antonio (Peru), on the border with Brazil, and also in Araguaia (Pará – Brazil). All places very distant from each other.

And now I will truly demonstrate the physiognomy of these animals based on the skeleton in the photo I presented earlier, the *Megalonyx wheatleyi*, which has kept me awake at night, since it is so exact that I have not been able to find another that surpasses it.

Although the size is not that of an adult, I imagine it with skin, floppy ears, the slender neck they know how to hide beneath that pronounced bony hump, the same that, when they are upright on two legs, forms a triangle that gives them a “bodybuilder” appearance, muscular, broad, and imposing.

The most incredible thing is the cunning they have in having managed to avoid us for hundreds of years, despite their size.

I have spent months thinking that I might be mistaken about the genus (*Megalonyx wheatleyi*) and that it could be another very similar species, of the family Megalonychidae.

That is why I made this image with my vivid memory, describing as accurately as possible the appearance of these animals, which truly have this disproportionate look between the head and the body.



Chapter Nine: Request

I've sent emails to every public office in Brazil related to this topic, with their beautiful and horrible acronyms, but all I've gotten is a back-and-forth of emails.

To name a few, I cite:

INPA (National Institute for Research in the Amazon)

IPAAM (Institute for Environmental Protection of Amazonas)

IBAMA (Brazilian Institute of the Environment)

ICMBio (Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation)

CNPq (National Council for Scientific and Technological Development)

The directors of the Biodiversity and Forest Secretariats of the Brazilian Ministry of the Environment

The FSC (green seal) certifier IMAFLORA.org.br

The personal office of the Presidency of Brazil, answered by the Directorate of Historical Documentation, Claudio Soares Rocha

International institutions such as:

The Director's Office of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)

greenpeace.org.ar

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) – Regional Office for Latin America

These contacts have led me to learn about treaties, laws, and international agreements which, in theory, are the dream of a cooperative world that takes care of its treasures, and at the same time how difficult it would be to make reality in situations like this.

Still, I'm a born insister and a problem-solver, so I always think: I've already got the NO; now I'm looking for the YES.

That is why I ask:

The governments and national institutions of the countries that share the Amazon Biome, international organizations with forestry programs, international environmental organizations, private funds for ecological

research, companies in general with ventures in the Amazon, media specialized and related to nature.

How many animal species are there in Brazil?

Some answers from researchers or scientists are these:

“We produced estimates of the current total number of species known and the expected total number in Brazil... we estimated a known Brazilian biota of 170,000 to 210,000 species... we estimated the country’s total biota at 1.8 million species (CI 1.4 to 2.4 million), given that the Neotropics are the least studied region in the world...” Thomas M. Lewinsohn and Paulo Inácio Prado (2005), Department of Zoology, Institute of Biology of the State University of Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil.

The technical bulletin of 1989 of the Association of Latin American State Petroleum, referring to the Amazon area of Peru, says: “The flora and fauna of this Amazon region are considered among the richest in the world, with many known species and many more still unknown.”

Technical document no. 17 of October 1995, of the IIAP (Institute of Amazonian Research of Peru) recognizes stagnant research activity and the lack of inventories and evaluation of wildlife in prioritized and little-studied areas.

Charles Munn, conservation biologist, after his expedition to Madidi National Park, Bolivia, in the April 2000 issue of National Geographic said: “who knows how many species of flora and fauna live in this lost world.”

In Yasuní National Park, Ecuador, the director of the Scientific Station, biologist Pablo Jarrín, accepts the theory of Pleistocene refuges in that area, calling it the “ark of biodiversity” (2010).

The Dutch biologist and explorer Marc van Roosmalen, who in recent years discovered a new species of unknown peccary, and several unclassified monkey species in the Brazilian Amazon (November 2007 – www.dailymail.co.uk).

Greenpeace said “that the Amazon rainforest is home to 20 million people of all kinds of ethnicities, and also many areas remain virgin, so a large number of plant and animal species are still unknown to science” (Greenpeace.es – November 2005).

Because of all this I do not understand: why can't certain survivals of ancient or unknown species be easily accepted, and why not prevent through investigations, accepting reports of sightings before major ventures with irreversible impacts?

I request:

— The real application of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), signed by numerous countries at the Rio de Janeiro convention (1992), Brazil, (in full).

— The application of the respective National Laws of a biological-preventive nature in the respective countries surrounding the Amazon Biome.

— The real application of the 1999 International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) treaty (criteria 2 and 5).

— The real application of the FSC's international principles and criteria for forest management (principles 1 – 1.3 – 6.2 – 7.16 – 8.2 – 9 – etc.)

— The real application of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the UNEP-WCMC, World Conservation Monitoring Centre.

And many others related that have escaped me, suggesting:

Contact with the inhabitants of the aforementioned region, and simply setting up shared reception offices at the municipal level, in order to receive comments on unknown species to then be transcribed to specialized centers,

obtaining cumulative information patterns, while at the same time educating the public on the importance of their accounts for species conservation.

And indeed, so that other cases like mine do not occur, tired of knocking on doors that do not open, despite having a great truth under my arm.

In fact, with this evasive attitude they show, it makes one think that they “tame” the Amazon for purely commercial purposes, doesn’t it?

Try, powerful businessmen of this world, to ensure that your heirs, children, grandchildren, do not feel shame tomorrow. Leave spaces, reserves, parks, life... pride!, with the simple “moderation” of your ambitions and projects that impact biodiversity.

The Amazon rainforest is much more than the “lungs of the planet,” it is a world in itself, it is past, present, and future for everyone.

I know that my words may be inconvenient and untimely for some, delusional or fictitious for others, and perhaps reassuring for those who, like me, know that this account is a reality; but my intention with it is to set a precedent in time, since at some point someone will find conclusive evidence, and on the other hand to give it an awareness-raising sense, to all those involved in it, so that in the near future they consider more responsibly the possible impacts on biodiversity, known or yet to be discovered.

Epilogue

Dear friends and readers, I can only promise to keep exploring and trying to be heard. If any of you happen to witness something unknown (but rational), please don't stay silent. Share it, investigate, and ask questions—there is still so much we have yet to discover.

For my part, whoever you are, you have my full support.

Someone once said, "reality surpasses fiction," and they couldn't have been more right.

Ironically or not, 2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity...

Many thanks.

Email: luisjorgesalinas@live.com.ar

Acknowledgments

To my friend, biologist and TV presenter Richard Rasmussen, his wife Sabrina Martins, and the entire TXAI Productions team, for their frankness and respect, and for the unforgettable experience that was the expedition with Lourenço Depizzol Jr. and Pedro Ferreira Fernández Neto; for sharing the experience with me, thank you.

To the people who collaborated anonymously, with testimonies and data, thank you.

To my dear brother Sergio for agreeing to be coauthor of this story, thank you.

To all the family members, friends, and acquaintances who understand the reality of the events, thank you.

To the love of my parents, thank you.

To the love of my wife and daughters, thank you.